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Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AS-01 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 ACDA-07 ERDE-00 NRC-05 /068 W
----------170612Z 107718 /12
P R 170515Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4549
INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO
SECDEF WASHDC
CINCPAC HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 5037

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR KS US
SUBJ: KOREANS INTENSIFY DISCUSSION OF NUCLEAR OPTION

REF: SEOUL 4614 (020935Z JUN 77)

SUMMARY: KOREAN PREOCCUPATION WITH SECURITY ISSUES IN WAKE OF U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL DECISIONHAS FOCUSSED INCREASINGLY ON QUESTION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, ALTERING LONG-STANDING RNBATIVE TABOO ON THIS BUJECT. GROWING DISCUSSION OF TROOP WITHDRAWAL ISSUE DURING SPRING 1977 HAS BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY INCREASED ATTENTION TO POSSIBILITY OF ROK DEVELOPING NUCLEAR WEAPONS. MEDIA HAVE STRESSED NUCLEAR ISSUE HEAVILY IN PAST TWO DAYS, ESPECIALLY NOTING REPORT THAT U.S. PLANS WITHDRAW NUCLEAR WARHEADS AS TROOPS LEAVE. THIS DISCUSSION IS CLEARLY TOLERATED BY ROKG.

1. DURING EARLY PART OF 1977 KOREAN MILITARY AND CIVILIANS OFTEN COUPLED DISCUSSION OF TROOP WITHDRAWAL ISSUE WITH EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN OVER WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. NUCLEAR
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WEAPONS. RUMORS OF NUCLEAR WITHDRAWAL HAVE CIRCULATED WIDELY. AS CONSULTATIONS ON TROOP WITHDRAWAL COMMENCED IN LATE MAY, FOCUS ON NUCLEAR ISSUES ALSO INCREASED. MOST OF THIS DICUSSION INITIALLY CONCERNED THE RETENTION OF THE U.S. NUCLEAR UMBRELLA, AND PRESIDENT CARTER'S U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT INTERVIEW, IMPLYING U.S. STILL CONSIDERED USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, WAS WIDELY HAILED AS

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INDICATOR THAT THIS PROTECTION CONTINUED. YOMIURI REFERENCE
TO NUCLEAR POTENTIAL OF B-52 FLIGHTS, JUNE 7, PLAYED UP AS
FURTHER REINFORCEMENT, AND WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE
REFERRING TO NUCLEAR CAPABILITY OF U.S. AIR UNITS IN KOREA,
ALSO RECEIVED FRONT PAGE COVERAGE JUNE 12.

2. AT SAME TIME, ALTERNATIVE OF ROK DEVELOPING
NUCLEAR CAPABILITY HAS RECEIVED INCREASING ATTENTION.
REFERRED TO OCCASIONALLY IN ACADEMIC SEMINARS AND PRESS
ARTICLES EARLY IN YEAR, THIS POSSIBILITY HAS MOVED TO
FRONT PAGES IN RECENT WEEKS. FOREIGN STUDIES, SUCH AS
THOSE BY HUDSON INSTITUTE AND OTHERS, HAVE FREQUENTLY
BEEN CITED AS EVIDENCE THAT ROK HAS THIS CAPABILITY. FOREIGN
MINISTER AS WELL AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER NAM REPORTEDLY SPECUL-
ATED TO PRESS SOME WEEKS AGO THAT CIRCUMSTANCES IN ASIA COULD
FORCE ROK CONSIDERATION OF NUCLEAR OPTION. PROFESSOR YI
HO-CHAE (LEE HO JAE) OF KOREA UNIVERSITY, JUNE 13
PRESENTED TO A SEMINAR ATTENDED BY NUMEROUS ASSEMBLYMEN THE VIEW
THAT IT WOULD BE UNREALISTIC TO CONTINUE REGARDING DISCUSSION
OF ROK NUCLEAR ARMAMENT AS A TABOO. LIEE DID NOT
ADVOCATE NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT, BUT NOTED THAT MANY
MORE COUNTRIES WERE LIKELY TO BECOME NUCLEAR-CAPABLE IN
THE 1980S, AND THAT CONTINUED ROK RENUNCIATION OF NUCLEAR
ARMS WAS INCREASINGLY OPEN TO QUESTION, ALTHOUGH HE
PREDICTED SERIOUS DISAGREEMENT WITH THE U.S. ON
THIS SCORE. LEE'S PAPER RECEIVED WIDE ATTENTION IN THE
SEOUL PRESS, INCLUDING FARILY PROMINENT TREATMENTIN THE OFFICIAL
KOREAL HERALD JUNE 15.

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3. ON JUNE 16 ALL KOREAN PAPERS FEATURED THE WASHINGTON
STAR REPORT THAT UNDER SECRETARY HABIB AND GENERAL BROWN
HAD INFORMED THE HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE,
IN A CLOSED SESSION, THAT TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS WILL
BE REMOVED FROM KOREA WHEN THE U.S. TROOPS ARE WITHDRAWN,
THIS REPORT ALSO NOTES THE HUDSON INSITUTUTE'S REFERENCE
TO ROK POTENTIAL TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS. PRESS HAS
ALSO PLAYED UP U.S. PRESS SPECULATION ON ROK NUCLEAR CAPABILITY.

4. PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS MEADWHILE INDICATE FURTHER
EXTENSIVE SPECULATION ONNUCLEAR ISSUE, IN WHICH QUESTION
OF ROK WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT NOW SEEMS DIRECTLY LINKED WITH
U.S. NUCLEAR PRESENCE. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, WHICH RECONVENES
JUNE 20, WILL PRESUMABLY FEEL COMPELLED TO DISCUSS ISSUE
FURTHER.

5. COMMENT: WHILE WE HAVE NO DIRECT EVIDENCE GOVERNMENT HAS
DELIBERATELY INSPIRED DIKUSSION OF NUCLEAR QUESTION,
AUTHORITIES MUST BE TOLERATING IT. WHILE THERE ARE SOME IN

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND ELSEWHERE WHO RECOGNIZE THE GRAVE DANGERS NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT WOULD POSE FOR KOREA, MOST KOREANS STILL REACT EMOTIONALLY AND SUPERFICIALLY TO THE ISSUE, WITH TENDENCY TO ASSUME INDIGENOUS NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD BE LOGICAL COMPENSATION IF U.S. NUKES WITHDRAWN. ROKG MAY FEEL THAT TOO HEAVY-HANDED AN EFFORT TO SQUELCH THE DIALOGUE WOULD INSPIRE STILL GREATER ANXIETY, AS HAD BEEN THE CASE WITH EARLIER EFFORTS TO CONTROL DISCUSSIONS OF SECURITY ISSUES. HOWEVER, THERE ARE DOUBTLESS SOME IN GOVERNMENT WHO VIEW NUCLEAR OPTION AS A LEVER THAT CAN BE USED AGAINST THE U.S.

6. WE ARE CONTINUING OUR EFFORT TO DISCOURAGE ROK FROM NUCLEAR COURSE WHENEVER SUBJECT ARISES, AND EXPECT INCREASED OCCASION TO STRESS THIS VIEW IN COMING WEEKS. WE AND SOME KOREANS RECOGNIZE DANGERS OF TOO MUCH UNINFORMED SPECUALTION. HOWEVER, NOW PANDORA'S BOX IS OPENED OUR CONFIDENTIAL

BEST PROSPECT MAYLIE IN HOPE THAT CURRENT DIALOGUE CAN EVENTUALLY BE GUIDED TOWARD A MORE GENERALAGREEMENT REJECTIING THE NUCLEAR OPTION THAN WOULD BE POSSIBLE BY CONTINUING TO AVOID THE SUBJECT. WE WILL CONTINUE TO POINT OUT THE INTRINSIC DANGERS TO ROK OF NUCLEAR ARMS DEVELOP-MENT, BOTHIN TERMS OF REGIONAL STABILITY AND RELATIONS WITH U.S. WE ARE ALSO POINTING OUT NUCLEAR UMBRELLA FOR KOREA NOT SYNOMOUS WITH STATIONING OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WITHOUT REPEAT WITHOUT ACKNOWLEDGING OR COMMENTING ON STATIONING OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN KOREA.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES, NUCLEAR WEAPONS, TROOP REDUCTIONS, MILITARY PLANS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 17-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 SEOUL 4614
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
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Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2111491
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: KOREANS INTENSIFY DISCUSSION OF NUCLEAR OPTION
TAGS: MARR, MNUC, KS, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3dfafb7a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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